

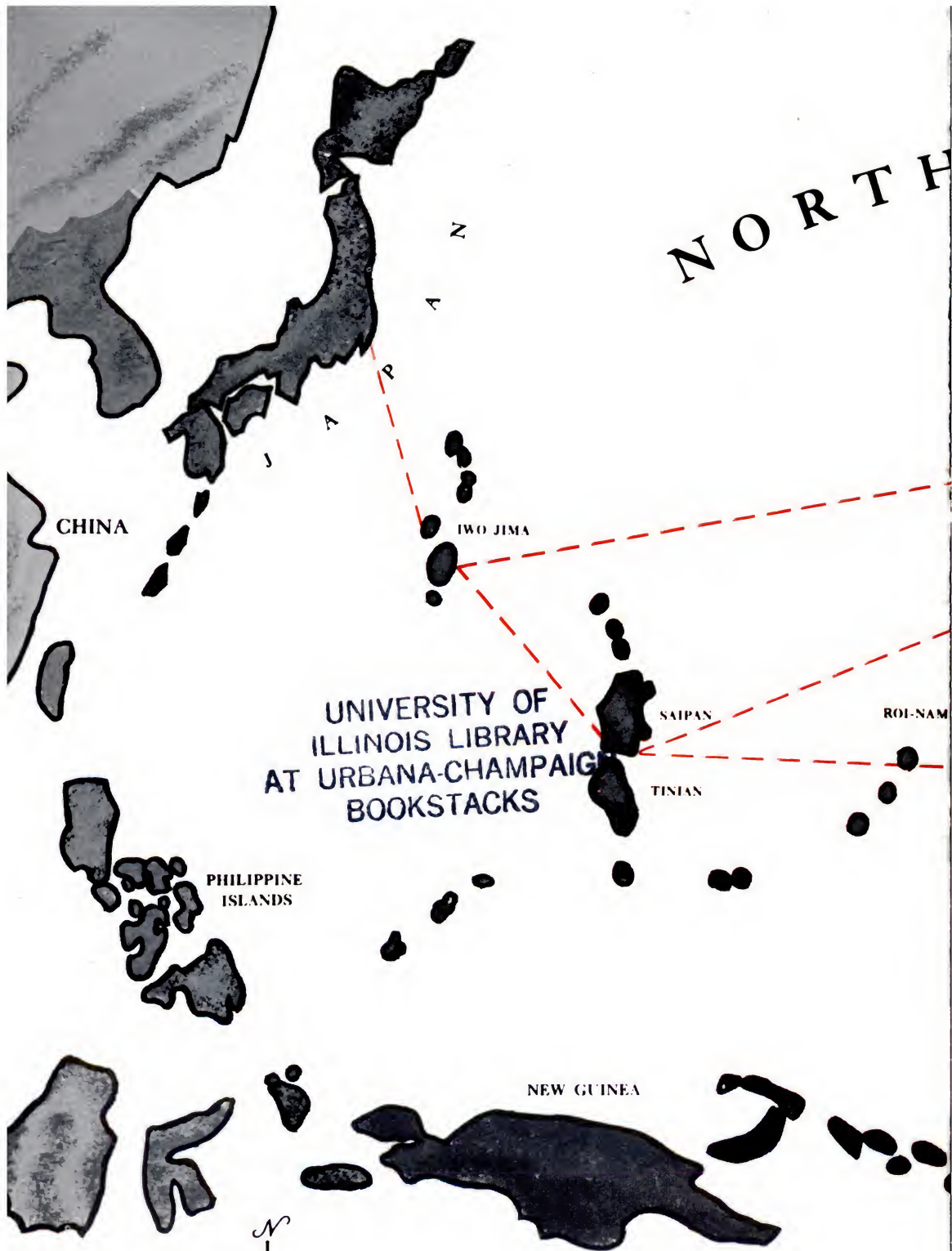
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**A Pocket History of**  
**THE 4TH MARINE**  
**DIVISION**  
**and**  
**THE 4TH MARINE**  
**AIRCRAFT WING**  
**in**  
**WORLD WAR II**



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# PACIFIC OCEAN

HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

## INTRODUCTION

Each generation of United States Marines picks up the thread of history and weaves its own accomplishments into the tapestry of valorous achievement that has matched, step by step, the growth of the larger fabric of our nation. This booklet has been prepared so that those who serve today in the historic 4th Marine Division and 4th Marine Aircraft Wing may know the legacy of honor with which they have been entrusted and to which they proudly add their own unique record.

On July 1, 1962, nearly two decades after the 4th Division and 4th Wing were first activated to help United States forces speed victory in World War II, these proud names were born again as the principal combat elements of the modern 4th Marine Division/Wing team of the Marine Corps Reserve. This seems particularly appropriate since the majority of Marines who fought and won with these units at Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima, and in the skies above the vast Central Pacific, were also Marine Reservists.



## 4TH MARINE DIVISION

For the 4th Marine Division, the building began at Camp Lejeune, N. C., where nearly all of the lower echelons were formed. Some units were activated at Camp Pendleton and the Division continued to grow there until during July and August, 1943, the entire Division was brought up to full strength at Camp Pendleton. On August 16, 1943, the 4th Marine Division was formally activated. Through intensive training, 19,446 officers and enlisted men were welded into a hard-hitting fighting machine by January, 1944.

On January 6 and 7, 1944, part of the 4th sailed from San Diego. The remainder of the Division departed just after daybreak on the 13th.











## ROI-NAMUR

In many ways, Operation Flintlock would be the most important of the Pacific War to date; it would be the first offensive assault against Japanese-mandated territory in World War II.

Invasion of the Marshall Islands would spearhead this drive. Roi Island, measuring only 1,200 by 1,250 yards, contained the principal airfield in the Marshalls. The adjoining island of Namur was 800 by 900 yards. Both were defended by an estimated 3,000 Japanese troops.

Following two days of naval and air bombardment, phase one of the operation—seizure of the small islands around Roi-Namur took place on January 31, 1944. Phase two—the main attack on Roi-Namur—began the following day.

Shortly after 11:00 a.m., the assault units were waved over the line of departure, 4,000 yards from shore. Naval



guns began hurling their final salvos against the beach; dive-bombers dropped 1,000-pound blockbusters on installations not yet demolished; fighter planes came over for strafing runs. It was the heaviest and most perfectly coordinated concentration of pre-landing bombardment yet seen in the Pacific.

And it paid dividends. Roi-Namur was declared "secured" just 24 hours and 15 minutes after the first wave of Marines had landed.

The operation was not without cost, however. There were 172 Marines of the 4th Division killed in action, 18 who died of wounds and 547 wounded.

The 4th Division had weathered its baptism of fire.



## SAIPAN

On May 29, 1944, slightly more than three months after returning to Maui, Hawaii, from Roi-Namur, 4th Division Marines sailed for Saipan. The importance of Saipan was appreciated by all hands. It was 1,485 miles from Tokyo—within B-29 range of all points in the Japanese home islands. American possession of Saipan would also cut the enemy's supply and communications lines from Japan to its armed forces in the Southwest Pacific.

D-Day for Saipan was June 15, 1944.

The 4th Division, with reinforcing units, numbered 21,618 troops. An estimated 22,702 Japanese Army troops and about 7,000 "Imperial Marines" defended the island.

The plan called for the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions to land abreast on a 4,000-yard stretch of beach.

There was no serious interference with the initial landing. Four thousand 4th Division Marines were landed in the first 20 minutes but Japanese artillery, mortars, and antiboat guns, ranged in on the beach, wreaked havoc with later waves of Marines.

The "harmless looking" island proved to be a fortress.

Following the initial landing, Japanese artillery and mortar fire increased in intensity, all down the line. Everywhere the severity of the battle increased. Casualties mounted. By dark, the 4th Division's beachhead had a maximum depth of 1,500 yards, although at many points it was much narrower.

A Japanese counterattack that night, aimed primarily at the 2nd Division, was beaten back. Just after noon the next day, 4th Division Marines resumed the attack. All Division artillery was ashore and, despite heavy enemy counterbattery fire, was gradually knocking out Japanese field pieces.

The Japanese again mustered all of their strength to stem the attack. By dark on the second day, the 4th had advanced only a few hundred more yards. The battle now settled down to a slugging match.

On D plus 3, however, it was apparent that the core of enemy resistance was badly shattered. 4th Division gains were costly, but significant. By evening of that day, the 4th Division was in a position to sweep northward up the eastern half of the island.





The “sweep” wasn’t an armored column-type dash. Neither the terrain nor the enemy permitted this. It was, instead, 25 more days of grueling combat against an enemy who yielded ground grudgingly, and only against the weight of superior infantry, artillery and air power. Saipan was secured on July 9, 1944.

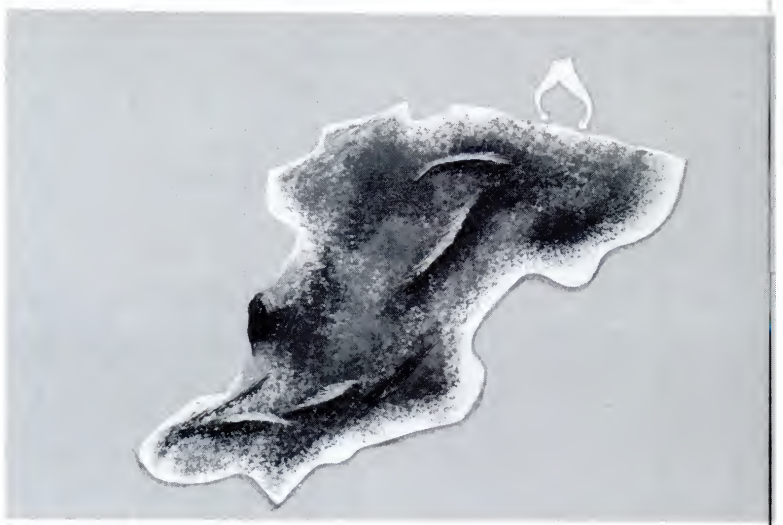
Again, the 4th Marine Division paid the high price of victory with 941 killed in action; 135 who later died from wounds; 4,905 wounded.

In defeat, the enemy paid a much higher price. More than 23,800 Japanese soldiers were known to be dead, and 1,810 had been taken prisoner.

We had won the most important Pacific base to date. Saipan was more than a mere stepping stone to Tokyo. It was an intersection on the main highway.

Other “intersections” lay ahead.

The next would be Tinian . . . in just two weeks.



## TINIAN

D-Day was set for July 24, 1944. The 4th Division was assigned the seemingly impossible task of making an assault landing on two beaches only 65 and 130 yards wide. Never in the course of the Pacific war had a unit of division strength tried to land on any beach smaller than twice the size of these two combined.

But land the 4th Division did, to the tactical surprise of the defending Japanese garrison.

Occasional rifle, machine gun and mortar fire was the only opposition encountered by the two assault regiments. The entire division was ashore within nine hours, thus executing what many military authorities consider "the perfect amphibious operation."

By nightfall, the Division held a beachhead 4,000 yards wide and 2,000 yards deep. It dug in for an expected counterattack.

The counterattack came. It was not a wild, unorganized attack, made in desperation, but a well-planned, carefully executed counterattack to destroy the Division's beachhead. It failed completely because 4th Division Marines were real veterans now, able to take in stride the best the Japanese could offer.

Daylight revealed the toll of Japanese along the Division's front; 1,241 bodies were counted, and an estimated 800 others had been retrieved by the enemy.



The Japanese had lost one-fifth of their defense garrison of 9,000 troops in this one night, breaking the back of their defense of Tinian. By August 1, all pockets of resistance had been wiped out. At 6:55 p.m. that day, Tinian was declared "secured."

On August 14, the last units of the Division began the long trip back to Maui. Tinian had cost the 4th Marine Division 250 killed, 1,515 wounded, and 24 missing in action.

In recognition of its work on Saipan and Tinian, the 4th Marine Division was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. It was making history.



## IWO JIMA

It would make more, beginning February 19, 1945—D-Day for the Battle of Iwo Jima.

The conquest of Iwo was of strategic importance to final victory in the Pacific. Only 758 miles from Tokyo, Iwo could provide life-saving emergency landing fields for the crews of the American Superforts then conducting mass raids on Japan. It was also a key base for Japanese interceptor planes. Capture of the island would eliminate this threat and make Iwo a base for U. S. fighter planes to escort the B-29s on their way to Japan.





As the first wave of Marines poured ashore, surprisingly little enemy fire was encountered.

Then the enemy came to life. Machine guns began to chatter. Dual-purpose guns, on the edge of the airfield, were depressed to deliver plunging fire on advancing Marines. From Mt. Suribachi and the hills to the north, the Japanese looked down the throats of attacking Marines. Artillery began to rack the beachhead with increasing intensity. Even in "demolished" pillboxes and blockhouses, Japanese were alive and fighting.

From that moment until the end of D-Day, 4th Division Marines clung to their beachhead by their fingertips . . . and by their guts. But they hung on.

The 4th was subjected to constant harassing fire and numerous attempts to infiltrate its lines throughout D-night. But the enemy did not launch a counterattack. He had learned his lesson on Saipan and Tinian. This time he was determined to retain the advantage of fighting from concealed and protected positions.

Next morning the full extent of Marine Corps losses was apparent. For two miles the debris along the beach was so thick that there were only a few places where landing craft could get in. Among the wreckage of burned and twisted weapons and equipment was death.

Yet, in the face of this, 4th Division Marines kept fighting.

By the end of the second day, Marine casualties totaled 2,011. Clearly, the 4th was facing a new kind of enemy—fanatic, determined, intelligent, well-directed, well-armed, and prepared to fight from immensely superior defensive positions.

This was the situation for 24 grim days—the time it took the Division to advance just slightly more than three miles.



Of these days, Scripps-Howard correspondent (then Marine Lieutenant) Jim G. Lucas wrote:

“It takes courage to stay at the front on Iwo Jima. It takes something which we can’t tag or classify to push out ahead of those lines, against an unseen enemy who has survived two months of shell and shock, who lives beneath the rocks of the island, an enemy capable of suddenly appearing on your flanks or even at your rear, and of disappearing back into his hole.

“It takes courage for officers to send their men ahead, when many they’ve known since the Division came into existence have already gone.

“It takes courage to crawl ahead, 100 yards a day, and get up the next morning, count losses, and do it again.

“But that’s the only way it can be done.”

Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz put it in these words:

“Uncommon valor was a common virtue.”



At 6:00 p.m. on March 16, 1945—twenty-six days and nine hours after the first troops landed, Iwo Jima was declared secured. The greatest battle in Marine Corps history was over.

And the cost to the 4th Marine Division? More than 9,000 men had become casualties—almost half of the Division strength. Of this number, 1,806 were killed in action.

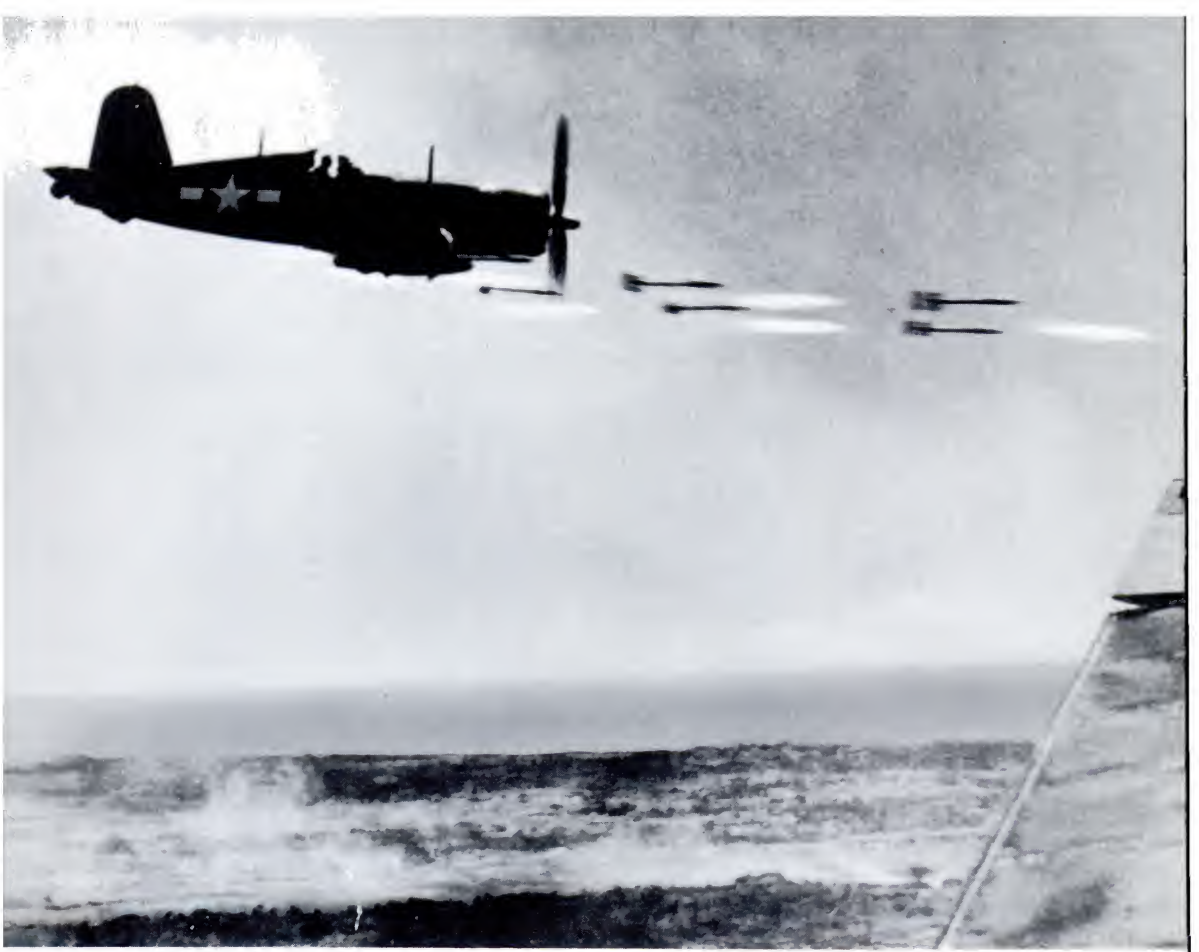
But this sacrifice was a giant step forward in the progress of the war. On March 4, Marines watched the first crippled B-29 settle down on Airfield No. 1. In the following days, the planes came in even greater numbers. Within a few months, the Army announced that 1,449 Superforts, with crews totaling 15,938 men, had used Iwo as an emergency landing field. Army P-51 Mustangs were based on Iwo even before the fighting stopped and soon were flying escort missions for the gigantic raids on Japan.

The 4th Division left Iwo Jima for Maui, Hawaii, March 19, 1945. On Maui it was brought up to strength, re-equipped and re-trained for the final offensive against Japan. After the surrender of Japan, however, the next landing for 4th Division Marines was San Diego and home.

The last units left Maui for Camp Pendleton, Calif. on November 3, 1945. Marines eligible for discharge were quickly processed and on their way home.

After 63 days of combat, four major beachheads in 13 months, and 17,722 casualties, the 4th Marine Division was formally deactivated on November 28, 1945.

The 4th Division had become part of the long, brilliant history of the United States Marine Corps.



## 4TH MARINE AIRCRAFT WING

For 4th Aircraft Wing Marines, World War II was a 4,825-mile battlefront across the vast Central Pacific, stretching from the Samoa Group through the Ellices, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas to Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Their missions of air defense for Naval and Marine Corps bases, search and patrol, transportation, air-sea rescue, shipping escort, and “keeping the stopper in the bottle” on by-passed Japanese islands and atolls were tedious and little-known or appreciated. But they were essential.

The 4th was commissioned August 22, 1942, at Ewa, Hawaii, as the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing. At its inception, the 4th Wing’s three Marine Aircraft Groups were based at Midway, Ewa, and Samoa. Wing headquarters remained at Ewa.



## THE CENTRAL PACIFIC

The Central Pacific was the biggest of all theaters in World War II. Because its islands were so minute, however, the Central Pacific never attained a prominence in Marine aviation operations to match the South Pacific. Once Central Pacific operations got underway, the leaps forward were too great to be covered by any planes except long-range bombers and carrier-based aircraft.

The 4th Wing flyers could only maintain the rear guard until the fighting for a given objective was over and new airfields were ready.

Their frustration was shared by Marine infantrymen who wished for close support from their own pilots. But it would have been necessary to start the Marines' carrier program at least a year earlier, and Marine aviation was fully committed in that earlier period to whittling down Japanese air strength in the Solomons.

## SAMOA

Samoa was an air-defense operation. Still there was more work than merely chasing radar bogeys that turned out to be friendly. Squadrons engaged in anti-submarine patrol, convoy cover, and photographic, instrument, and night flights. Training was excellent . . . Samoa-based pilots proved . . . when they were hurriedly thrown into Guadalcanal as replacements for some of the earlier squadrons sent there.

Although a Central Pacific offensive had been broached as early as February, 1943, several months were required to work out final plans. At the Quebec Conference in August, 1943, the route of advance through the Central Pacific was decided: Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas or Carolines.



## GILBERTS AND MARSHALLS

When Task Force 57 was activated on November 9, 1943, the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing consisted of two groups and 10 squadrons scattered from Samoa to Nanomea. One of its assigned missions was air transportation.

In preparation for this mission, the Central Pacific Combat Air Transport Service was established on November 16, 1943. Within ten days the first transport plane landed on the old Japanese airfield on Tarawa, just three days after its capture. Regularly scheduled passenger flights began December 16th.

The first unit of the 4th to engage in combat from the new bases was a group of five dive bombers which attacked Japanese shipping on December 21, 1943. This was the only offensive action by a 4th MBDW unit prior to 1944.

Plans for the invasion of the Marshalls again relegated Marine planes to rear area (Gilberts and Ellices) search,

patrol and transport aircraft missions. They would be pushed up into the forward areas as soon as there were new air bases where single-engine, land-based planes could be used.

## BOMBING BY-PASSED BASES

The March 12, 1944 cancellation of plans for the invasion of Truk in favor of its neutralization erased a job for Marine aviators and confined them to bombing by-passed islands. This was a vital mission, however. By-passed bases, unfortunately, don't disappear or become less of a threat simply by being by-passed. It was up to 4th MBDAW pilots to keep these bases shriveled and impotent.

If there was little glory and less hometown credit for 4th MBDAW Marines (the front lines were grabbing the front pages), there was at least a quiet military satisfaction. Their daily sorties over these by-passed Japanese bases forced the enemy to use submarines for supply which might otherwise have been used to destroy Allied shipping and combat fleet units.

Many secondary invasions of the Marshalls in February, March and April, 1944 were supported by the 4th Wing Marine pilots and this workout on the Marshalls contributed more than the death of isolated Japanese defenders on these atolls. The 4th Marine Aircraft Wing perfected the napalm fire jelly formula during these operations, thus contributing importantly to future Pacific operations. It also developed the fighter-bomber, that vital, dual-purpose aircraft which was so sorely needed when more fighter planes were required to protect the fleet from the kamikaze.



## ATTACKING JAPANESE SHIPPING



In November, 1944, a night bomber squadron of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing began attacking Japanese shipping from its base on Saipan.

The nearest shipping targets to Saipan were at Iwo Jima, 630 miles to the north, and at Chichi, 120 miles farther. During the first two weeks, the 27 crews of the squadron, all of which were green, showed little proficiency. Some got lost, others couldn't find their targets, and still others had trouble with unfamiliar, sophisticated electronic equipment.

But the crews improved with experience.

They found, for example, that by removing overhead turrets, package guns and everything else not essential to flying, navigating, and carrying radar equipment and eight rockets, they could extend their striking range to 900 miles. They also found more shipping targets at

Chichi—within this range. Three planes searched every night, one in the Iwo area, another up the west side of Haha and down the east side, and the third around Chichi. Three more planes stood by at Saipan until midnight, in case a convoy was sighted.

On successive nights all planes claimed to hit Japanese shipping—six straight hits in two nights. During the Saipan phase of the squadron's operations, two ships were claimed as probably sunk, 27 damaged. From Saipan, 49 anti-shipping attacks were made. Three Marine planes were lost, along with five officers and eight enlisted men.

## DESIGNATION CHANGED

In the fall of 1944, the 4th MBD AW officially became an Aircraft Wing without the "Base Defense" appendate. Its mission remained much the same . . . continued destruction of Japanese shipping, neutralization of bypassed Japanese defenses, transportation of Marines and matériel . . . and perfection of dive-bombing and close air support tactics.

The indispensable contribution of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing to victory in the Pacific was made clear in a statement by Rear Admiral DeWitt C. Ramsey, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics:

"The 4th Marine Air Wing in the Central Pacific has had an opportunity to test fighter-bombing techniques daily in large-scale operations for the past nine months. Over 75 percent of the targets have been 50 feet or less in diameter whereas the normal dive-bomber target is 200 feet in diameter. These targets in the main were Japanese gun positions which were eliminated one by one

by fighter-bombers. The 4th Wing also developed low-altitude attacks on small targets, usually Japanese block-houses 50 feet square and only 20 feet high, which had also been eliminated by bomb-carrying Marine fighters. A Marine fighter-bomber pilot just back from this work reported that he would like to have a try at some of the German targets, "and if they asked me to bomb a factory," he said, "my first question would be—'What department?'"

Not all fighter-bombers were flown by Marines. But all who manned fighter-bombers learned from textbooks written by 4th Marine Aircraft Wing flyers, chiefly over the atolls Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit.

## AIR-GROUND TEAM

As the war progressed, Marine infantrymen and pilots became a more effective team, paving the way for today's closely coordinated air-ground teams.

From its base at Roi, a Fighter Squadron of the 4th covered several landing operations.

A Dive-Bomber Squadron of the 4th supported landings at Wotho, Lae and Ujae Atolls from its base on Engebi.

The longest recorded sustained flight for Corsairs under combat conditions was established by another Fighter Squadron of the 4th while covering a landing at Ujelang Atoll. F4U's were airborne for nine hours, 40 minutes.

Units from three Air Groups of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing were detached from the Wing to support the landing on Okinawa, in April, 1945.



One squadron which had participated in dive-bombing attacks on Luzon joined the 4th. With land bases close enough to the Japanese home islands from which their fighters and dive-bombers could operate, the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing was poised and ready to support the final offensive against Japan when the war ended.

In this crucible of fire in World War II, the officers and enlisted men of the 4th Marine Division and the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing not only contributed valiantly to final victory in the Pacific; they also developed and refined the air-ground tactics that proved sound five years later in Korea and made possible the powerful air-ground teams of today.

The modern 4th Marine Division/Wing team of the Marine Corps Reserve is the product of the Marines who, in World War II, set an inspiring goal of unselfish devotion to Country and Corps. It is also the product of the new generation of Marines whose same qualities of patriotism and devotion make these historic names live again, setting new standards of accomplishment.

It has ever been so in the United States Marine Corps.



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